

Woman's Union Missionary Society.

WHAT A PAIR OF SLIPPERS DID FOR INDIA.

A TRUE STORY.

IT is a sultry afternoon in India. The wife of a missionary sits quietly plying her needle with busy fingers, gradually bringing to completion a pair of slippers she is working for her husband. Although the pattern is so intricate and the execution so skillful that they would seem to demand all her attention, her mind is rather occupied with thoughts about the multitude of highborn women in that land of roses whose condition is worse than that of convicts in our own State prisons. Many and many a time has she endeavored to do something for them, but as often has she been repulsed. She has hoped that when the young men who had been educated in the mission schools grew up, she might have influence with them, and through them gain her end. She had labored with them faithfully, but all in vain. The force of what she argued upon them they acknowledged. They felt that it was desirable for their wives to be educated, but they were powerless to help them. The iron chains of ancient custom, the grinding tyranny of religious superstition, the machinery of a domestic red-tapism, thwarted their efforts and destroyed their hopes. And now, almost despairing of ever accomplishing her noble desire, she has committed their interests to the God she loved and served, praying Him to open a door for the relief of these domestic captives. And so she sits busily working, fast completing the gift she designs for him she loves; rejoicing and

thanking God that her lot has been so blessed that she is enabled to aid her husband in his work—that she is permitted to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free, untrammelled by false religion and social propriety.

The last stitch is taken, and she is resting with a quiet contentment in regard to her own condition, and in fancy dwelling on the comfort her little gift will afford her husband, when the door opens and in walks a Babu, or native gentleman, one of her former pupils. He picks up the slippers, and is lost in admiration. Their bright colors attract him; the skill manifested in their execution is something surpassing. He had never seen their like before. And a WOMAN made them, worked them out stitch by stitch, and did it with that marvelous magical instrument, the needle!

“Babu, would you not like your wife to learn how to make you a pair of slippers?” The thought flashes through her mind like an inspiration from on high. “If you will let me, I will come and teach her.”

The idea takes him. She lends him the slippers, and he hurries away to his home. The slippers are shown from one to another. The story is told of their being made by a woman, and by means of a little instrument they have never seen, and of whose virtues they were utterly ignorant. Curiosity gets the better of the superstition; ambition, of custom. “Could they learn? Was it possible for them to make anything so beautiful? Why not let the despised Christian woman come to them? The pollution they could efface by the appropriate ceremonies, and how pleasant it would be for them to have something to occupy their time, something beautiful in itself!”

So they talk it over, this one's mother-in-law with that one's mother-in-law, and so until the consent of all has been gained, even of the wife of the old patriarch of the family, whose will is the ultimate law respecting everything that transpires in the zenana, or woman's apartment. The missionary lady is invited to come and teach the ladies in that house, and soon they have solved the mysteries and become familiar with the powers of the inscrutable needle. Quick to learn, they soon have achieved results which do credit to their teaching and their skill.

Babu So-and-So takes the pair of slippers his wife had embroidered and shows them, with justifiable pride, to Babu Thus-and-So. He in turn shows them to the ladies in his house, and they know they can learn just as well as the ladies in Babu So-and-So's zenana; so why not let the missionary lady come and teach them? She is invited; she comes; they learn quickly; and so the work spreads. A pair of slippers has opened the doors upon the most heart-grinding captivity practiced in the world! A pair of slippers has been the instrument of letting in a ray of light upon thousands who for ages have been sitting in the darkness of the shadow of death!

Considered merely in the light of a social reform, it commends itself to our sympathy and interest. To give some little occupation higher than the menial duties which have hitherto engrossed all their time to those who naturally are the peers in mental power and physical beauty of the most favored ladies in the world is of itself enough to enlist the zeal and aid of all. But that is the least that is accomplished. Along with the fancy work, the missionary teaches these poor women how to read, and tells them the attractive stories and the cheering promises of

the Bible. The truth of God has made its power felt in the midst of these old superstitions, and the desire to know how to work a pair of slippers has in some cases not been fully satisfied till the feet of the scholar have been taught to walk in the way of holiness.

The wretched condition of women in heathen countries is well known, however little it is appreciated. Among them there is one class to which attention has lately been called, which seems to be particularly wretched and unfortunate. **THREE-FOURTHS OF THE WOMEN IN INDIA ARE PRISONERS FOR LIFE** in the homes of their husbands, whence they are never allowed to go forth except occasionally to worship some idol, or, under certain circumstances, to visit their father's home, but always under strict guard, and so shut up as never to see anything outside of their own miserable apartments. What little freedom they possess originally is lost entirely as soon as they are married; and as it is a disgrace for any girl not to be married before she is ten years old (and they are frequently married when only four or five), most of them grow up without any memory of anything before that period. A tree or a flower is a wonder to many of them.

Nor are there any alleviations in their lot in respect to education or culture. They are ignorant of almost everything, and have no interest beyond the preparation of their daily meals. Their clothing is scanty and forlorn. Their apartments have almost no furniture, and nothing whatever in the way of ornaments or even conveniences. The climax of misery is reached, however, in their **WIDOWS**—unfortunate creatures, who are doomed to hopelessness in this life and that to come, according to their practice and creed. Mere little girls four or five years old,

betrotthed and married before they have outgrown their baby playthings, if they have seen their husbands but once, are widows for life should he die, and have only the fearful experience of a comfortless life and a hopeless death. Language is inadequate to describe the forlornness of their condition. It is THEIR sin which is supposed to have caused their husband's death, and the only way of showing a proper respect to his memory on the part of all the inhabitants of any house is to neglect or heap indignities and cruelties upon the unfortunate widow.

But if women are thus despised, it would be a very false conclusion to suppose that they possess little or no influence. On the contrary, among them reside the practical present and future strength of heathenism. Bigotry is the handmaid of ignorance. The ignorance must be dispelled before attachment to their false religion can be broken. Moreover, so long as they remain faithful teachers of Hinduism, and instill into the minds of the young their own narrow and false notions, so long must every other means of Christianizing the nation be retarded. The most practical means of reaching any people is to train up the members of the rising generation, as has been evidenced everywhere in the history of missions. How important then becomes every effort put forth to reach those who naturally and successfully exercise the greatest influence over the young! As long, however, as women are secluded, debarred from places where instruction is given, and forcibly held back from learning, and that by such means as to render all approach impossible, missionary effort is obliged to go over and over again the same tract, training boys and young men to be Christians *after they have been made Pagans by their ignorant and bigoted mothers.*

To reach the women is the object of "The Woman's Union Missionary Society of America for Heathen Lands," organized in 1860. Its labors cover stations in China and Japan, but a peculiar interest attaches to its efforts in the zenanas of India.

In Calcutta alone this Society—THE FIRST AMERICAN ONE ever engaged in zenana teaching—has thousands of these secluded women under instruction. Stations have been opened in other portions of India, where the work is progressing with equal rapidity.

Orphanages for homeless girls are maintained in Calcutta and Cawnpore. The oldest members are now commencing their work as native Christian teachers, giving entire satisfaction to the missionaries.

The Society, without paid officers or agents, has grown yearly in influence and ability, widening its circle of friends and supporters, commending itself by the Christian union which pervades it (several denominations being represented among its managers and missionaries) and by its appeal to the heart of every true woman to do what she can to aid her sisters whom idolatry crushes.

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